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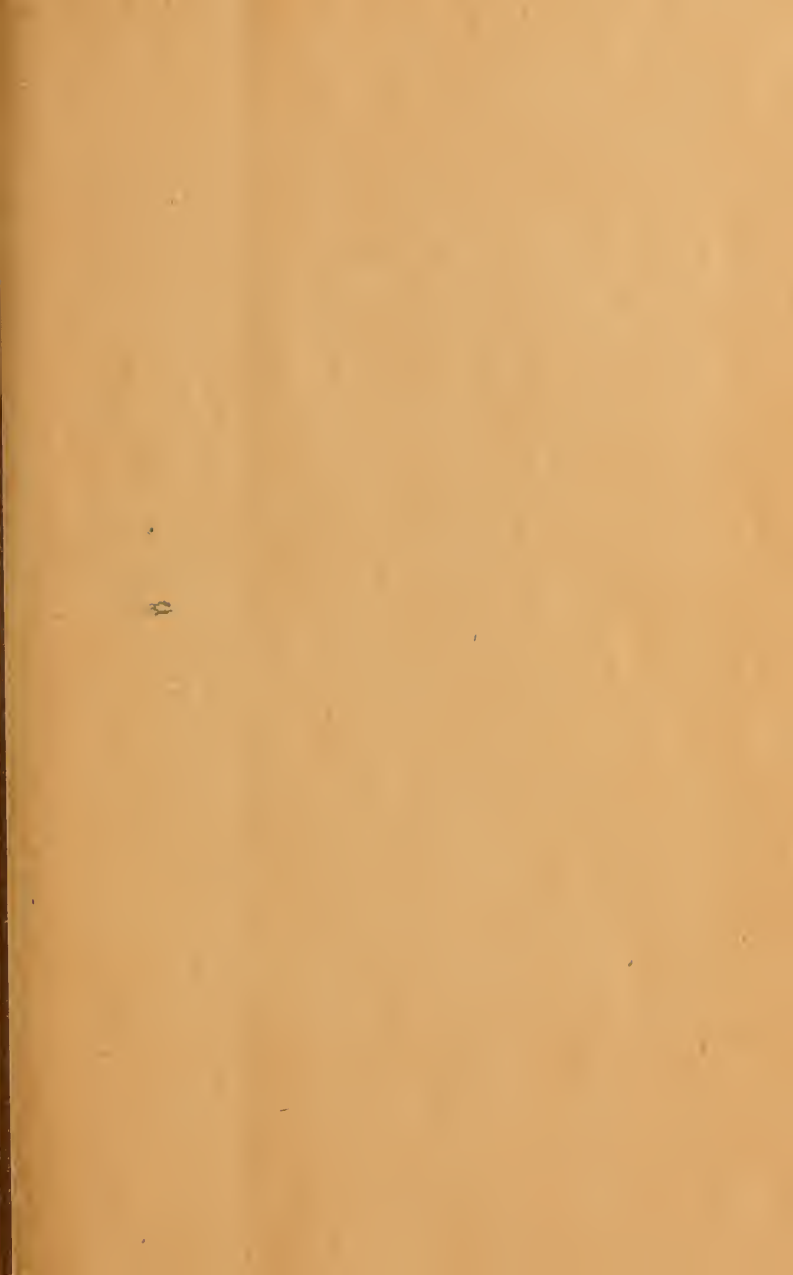


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# Letter to the Editor

of

## “The Bookman”

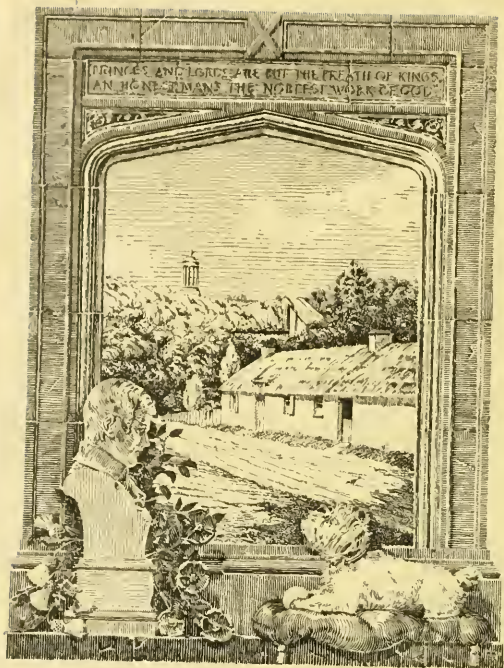
On certain paragraphs which appeared in  
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on

*“Robert Burns and Mrs. Dunlop: correspondence now published in full for the first time. With elucidations by William Wallace.” (London. 1898.)*

GLASGOW : PRIVATELY PRINTED.

1898.



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NOTE.—This brochure is intended to form a supplement to “Robert Burns and Mrs. Dunlop : Correspondence —reprinted from *The Scotsman*.” (Glasgow : privately printed, 1898.)



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NOTE.

THE *raison d'être* of this letter is found in the following paragraphs, which appeared in May issue of *The Bookman*. The letter was sent in ordinary course to the editor of that journal. He, however—for reasons easily guessed—did not see his way to insert it.

“There is at present quite a controversy raging in Scotland over Mr. William Wallace’s recent volume, *The Burns-Dunlop Correspondence*. Competent critics of the un-common Burnsite type regarded the volume as very complete in its way; and it was certainly satisfactory to have the letters, which previous biographers of the poet had mutilated and Bowdlerised, presented in their native integrity. Mr. J. C. Ewing, of Glasgow, was not of that opinion, and, like a free-born North Briton, he “wrote to the papers” to tell the world so. He does not like Mr. Wallace’s latest volume; he does not admire Mr. Wallace’s edition of Chambers’s *Life and Works of Robert Burns*; and he has grave doubts about the accuracy of Henley and Henderson’s *Centenary Burns*. But when his complaints about all three books are calmly examined, they do not amount to much. It seems that though Mr. Wallace made a goodly-sized volume of the correspondence, there were actually three letters in existence which he could not obtain. Two of these he noted as “missing”; the other he did not discover. Anyone

who knows practically what editing a volume of this kind means, will look upon this omission as a venial fault. Besides, as Mr. Wallace had employed Mr. Ewing to collate some of the MSS. for his edition of Chambers's *Burns*, it was hardly friendly on Mr. Ewing's part to withhold the knowledge of the whereabouts of this missing letter from Mr. Wallace.

"Replying to Mr. Ewing's attack, Mr. Wallace makes a very good defence. He never assumed omniscience on the subject of *The Burns-Dunlop Correspondence*, but, like every other editor of Letters, he asked the co-operation of everyone who knew where such documents were to be found, and he always courteously acknowledged any assistance which he received. It was, therefore, taking an unfair advantage of him for Mr. Ewing to remain silent on the matter so that he might querulously complain about the volume after it was published. At least, this is how the matter will strike anyone who candidly examines the lengthy newspaper correspondence that has arisen on this momentous subject.

"Messrs. Henley and Henderson are as little satisfied with Mr. Ewing's animadversion as Mr. Wallace is. They flatly contradict some of his statements, and dispute his assertions as to the mysterious Edinburgh "stinking" edition, which has so long been a puzzle to students of Burns. That question has not yet been settled, though the theory advanced by Mr. Barclay Murdoch in the *Burns Chronicle* for 1895 is a very reasonable conjecture. That gentleman suggests that after a certain number of the sheets of the First Edinburgh edition had been printed off, the demand for copies became so great that the types of these sheets had to be reset. Hence it has arisen that some copies of the Edinburgh edition have the word "skinking" in the last verse of the "Address to a Haggis," while others have the word misprinted "stinking." That was the common-sense conclusion that Mr. Barclay Murdoch arrived at, after

carefully collating two copies of the First Edinburgh edition. After all, it is a point more interesting to Burns collectors than to students of the poet's works. As Messrs. Henley and Henderson stigmatise Mr. Wallace's volume as "his very inadequate edition of the Dunlop Correspondence," the dispute has developed into a triangular duel. Nevertheless, the genuine admirers of Burns will esteem Mr. Wallace's book as a very valuable contribution to Burnsiana."

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POSSILPARK, GLASGOW,  
12th May 1898.

To the Editor of *The Bookman*.

Sir,—“News notes” in the May *Bookman* include three paragraphs relative to a controversy which has been “raging” for some weeks past in the columns of *The Scotsman*. It is nothing to me that your correspondent has failed entirely to grasp the points in dispute; but it does concern me that, while professing to have “candidly examined the correspondence,” he has given an altogether one-sided review of the controversy—in which my name has figured largely—a review against which I protest.

Your correspondent says that the *Burns-Dunlop Correspondence* is regarded as “very complete in its way” (*sic*) by “competent critics of the *un*-common Burns site type.” The latter phrase conveys no meaning until

we are told who these "critics" are; and where they have been demonstrating the perfection of the *Burns-Dunlop Correspondence*. I care naught for veiled authority; and I venture to say that the correspondent in *The Bookman* would not have written of the subject or of myself as he has done, if his communication had been followed by his name. Why this anonymous stab? Is the writer cowed under the "placeman's gag"; or would his name reveal a "log-rolling" propensity? For one or other of these reasons we are left to conjecture as to the authorship.

I am charged with being a "free-born North Briton," and with "writing to the papers." To both accusations I plead guilty. For the former I am not responsible, while, as to the latter, it would be more correct to say that I wrote several letters on the *Burns-Dunlop Correspondence* to *The Scotsman*, and that not any one of the points to which I drew attention has been successfully controverted, either by the "elucidator" of the *Burns-Dunlop Correspondence* or by the joint-editors of *The Centenary Burns*, whose "relation to the controversy was indirect."

We are told that "Mr. Wallace's book is a very valuable contribution to Burnsiana." Nothing that I have written controverts that

dictum. I do not controvert it even now. I affirm, however, that Mr. Wallace—left to himself—has not made the most, or anything like it, of his opportunity. Again, your correspondent says my “complaints do not amount to much.” He has not, however, discounted their value; I shall not appraise it. But let me note one or two of these “complaints.”

(A) Regarding the letters omitted, or given (as by previous editors) only in fragments, let me point out that *fifteen* (not *three*, as your correspondent says) are wholly omitted, and that the garbled letters have not been completed as one with a knowledge of the whereabouts of his subject-matter could, and would, have completed them. Several of the omitted Dunlop letters are well-known to frequenters of our public institutions, where they have long been silently pleading with the arm-chair editor to come and print them. And is it not the height of inanity to say that “two letters Mr. Wallace noted as ‘missing’; the other he did not discover (*sic*)”? Truth to tell, Mr. Wallace “discovered” *nothing*, neither for his “revised” Chambers *Burns* nor for his “elucidated” *Burns-Dunlop Correspondence*. Your correspondent makes no reference to the bowdlerised Burns letters to which I referred in *The Scotsman*. Several



of these also are in public institutions and known to Burns students who "know their way about."

(B) I was not asked, nor was I under any obligation, to assist Mr. Wallace in the "elucidation" of the *Burns-Dunlop Correspondence*; nor am I bound to do the work that Mr. Wallace himself undertook. It is true that I collated MSS. for the Chambers *Burns*, though what connection that has with the "withholding" of information from Mr. Wallace is not apparent. At the time of collating such MSS. there was no thought of Mr. Wallace being saddled with the "elucidation" of the *Burns-Dunlop Correspondence*, and certainly he never mentioned it to me. I fail to see how it was "hardly friendly" on my part to "withhold knowledge of the whereabouts of missing letters from Mr. Wallace." Mr. Wallace being the "Chief Authority on the subject"—so, at least, he is advertised—I took it for granted that such "Chief Authority" would know all about the business. I regret to find such is not the case.

(C) As to the points of difference (bibliographical) between the Centenary Editors and myself, your correspondent is not ingenuous. True, as he says, Messrs. Henley and Henderson "flatly contradicted [two] of my

statements," but why did your contributor withhold part of the truth? Why not tell that the Centenary Editors have since "climbed down"? I maintained that Burns, when he wrote to Mrs. Dunlop that he had "both a second and a third *Edition* going on," knew what he was writing, and meant *edition* and not *impression*, as the Centenary Editors endeavoured to make out. (Your correspondent's notes on Mr. Barclay Murdoch's theory have not the most distant bearing on the point at issue.) I further maintained—and maintain—that the world-famed "Tam o' Shanter" was first published by Captain Grose in his *Antiquities of Scotland* and not in *The Edinburgh Magazine*. Burns's letter of 28th February 1791 to Dr. Moore proves Messrs. Henley and Henderson to be wrong in their statement, which also—*inter alia*—Mr. Wallace filched for his *Burns-Dunlop Correspondence*. That gentleman, when taken to task, excuses himself on the ground that "each new editor pilfers from his predecessors, and—what for no!" I can quite understand that Messrs. Henley and Henderson, who have shown persistent and praiseworthy industry, should have occasionally gone astray, but how Mr. Wallace, who from beginning to end has ventured on no excursions of the kind, could in the instances mentioned in *The*

*Scotsman* have gone wrong—in the same direction and to the same extent as the Centenary Editors—admits of only one conclusion. Your correspondent might have been candid enough to tell your readers that Mr. Wallace has found it convenient not to reply to the Centenary Editors' pertinent note containing a direct charge against him of "pilfering."

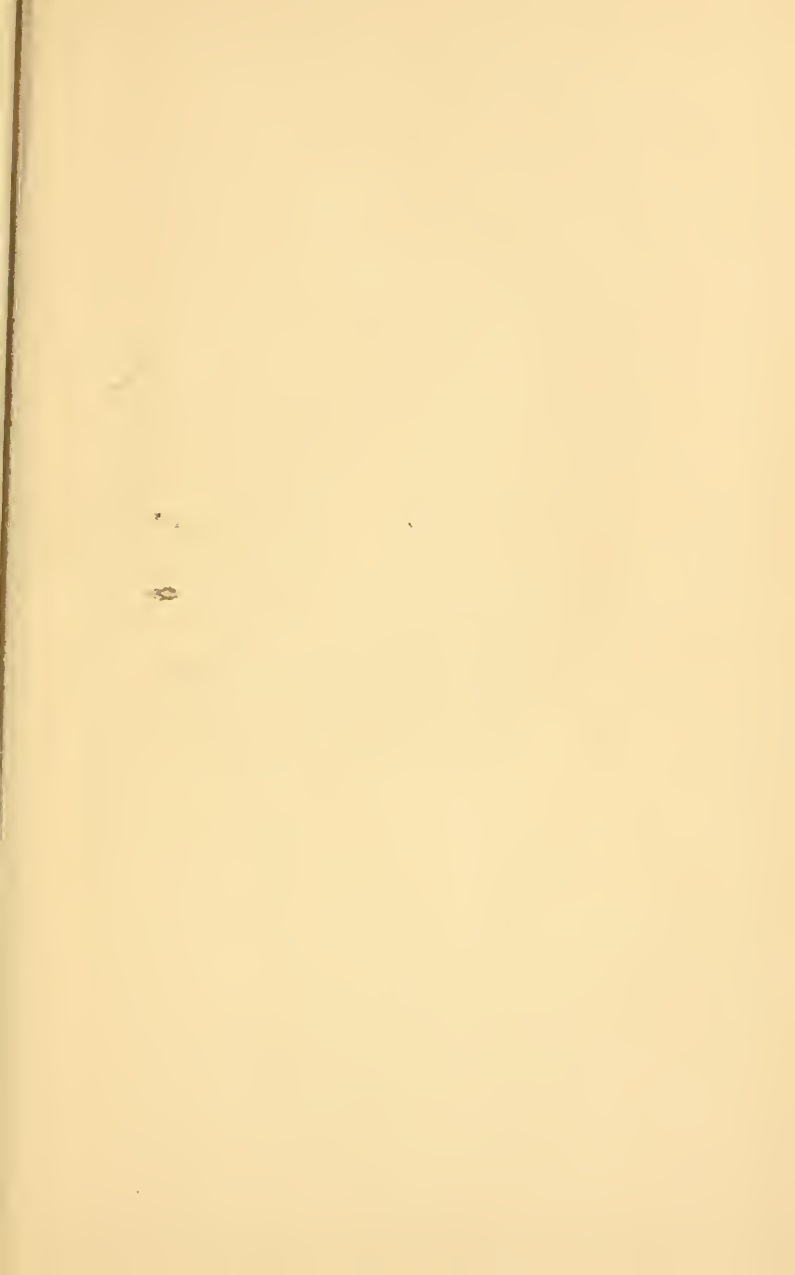
(D) That I—in common with others—do not "admire" the revised Chambers *Burns* is, I think, excusable. I know no student of Burns who does not regret the feeble attempt made by Mr. Wallace to mix his new wine with the old Chambers. Few have a taste for blends of the kind. I say nothing of the insult implied by the effacement—"revision" the "Chief Authority" calls it—of Dr. Chambers's *Burns*, the work by which he is chiefly remembered. Robert Chambers gave us a personal work, as did Cromek, Pickering and Scott Douglas, who, in their respective ways, were pioneers and gatherers of material, which also Mr. Henderson is, but which Mr. Wallace has shown himself not to be. All along the Chambers *Burns* has been recognized as a classic, and as such it had better remained. Chambers plus Wallace might have been tolerated, but, blended as they confusedly are, one reading along does not know whether it be the voice of Esau that he hears or the

voice of Jacob. That being so, who will deny that "the last state of that *book* is worse than the first"?

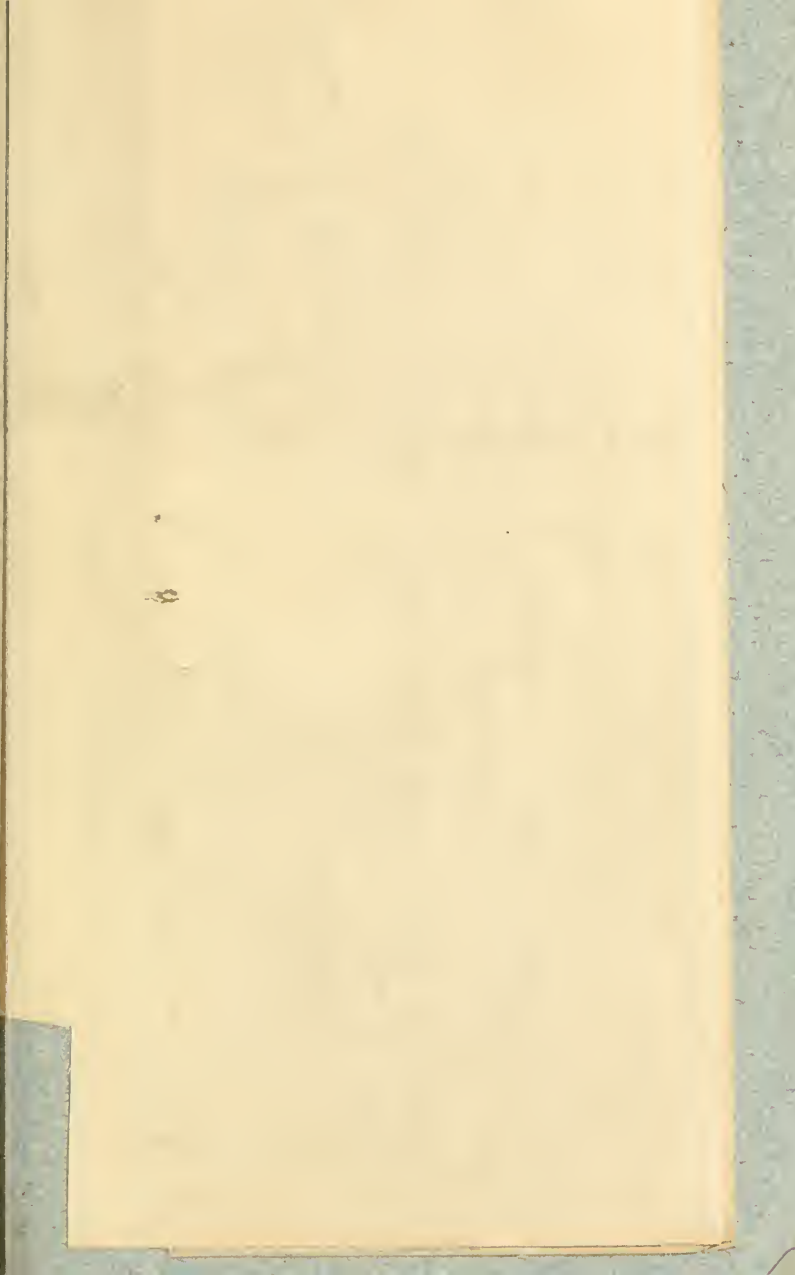
(*E*) Your correspondent misrepresents (by insinuation) my view of *The Centenary Burns*. I have already (in *The Scotsman*) paid my mead of praise to Messrs. Henley and Henderson's magnificent performance — a performance reflecting honour on our literature and credit to the joint-editors. The words I used were: "We are all grateful to Messrs. Henley and Henderson for the unique work they have done for the poet as a poet; and but for their frequent adventurous cocksureness . . . and a want of that reserve and balanced expression which usually characterise men of sound judgment, I feel certain that *The Centenary Burns* would have been received with universal acclaim."

Relying, sir, not on my right as a "free-born North Briton" but, on your sense of fair-play and as editor of a periodical of literary opinion, I thank you in anticipation for inserting this reply.—I am, etc.,

J. C. EWING.









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